# *History of*

# *First United*

# *Church of Christ*

*Winston-Salem, N.C.*

*Sept. 8, 1905 - Sept. 7, 1980*

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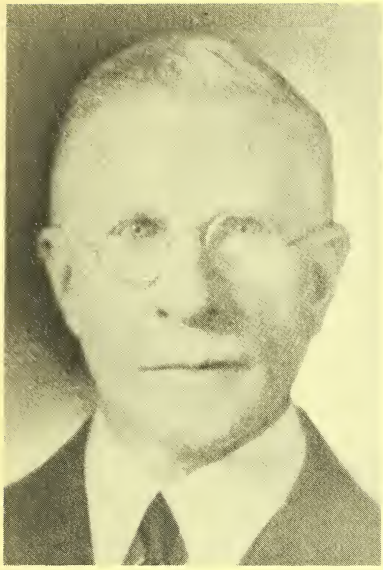


Rev. William H. Causey

Rev. David E. Bowers

During the latter part of the Nineteenth Century, several families of the Reformed Church in the United States came to the Waughtown community southeast of the town of Salem. Many of these sought and found work at the George E. Nissen Wagon Shop.

At the turn of the century, the Waughtown area was part of the jurisdiction of the Upper Davidson Charge, of which the Rev. W.H. Causey was pastor.

The assembly of the church, the Classis, appointed a committee each year to look for places to start missions. The records of the Classis show that the Rev. H.A.M. Holshouser was placed in charge of the interest at Waughtown from 1902 to 1904. In 1903, he reported that there was no place to hold services.

In 1905, the Waughtown mission was placed under the Upper Davidson Charge. That year, Rev. Causey came to the area, and, on Sept. 8, 1905, he conducted one service in the home of J.S. Wear.

Twelve people were present at the service: J.S. Wear, Sam A. Wear, Andrew Wear, F.E. Wear, C.M. Wear, Mary S. Wear, Albert A. Long, Lewis P. Long, David I. Long, J. Roscoe Long, E.E. Long and Mary Long.

J.S. Wear reported that the name Zion was suggested as the name of the group.

Rev. Causey reported to the Classis in 1906, "Duty at Waughtown completed Sept. 8, 1905. Nothing further done. (Name chosen, Zion.)"

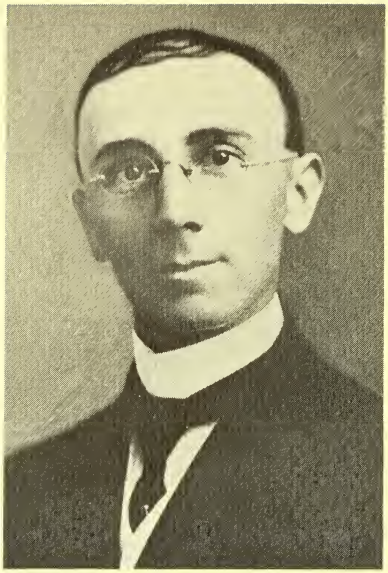
Though that service marked the beginning of the work of the Reformed Church in the Waughtown area, no church was organized, no members accepted, no officers elected.

There seem to have been no further services at Waughtown until 1907, when the Rev. D.E. Bowers of High Point began preaching in the area. His record of services indicates he preached "at Waughtown" on Dec. 8, 1907.

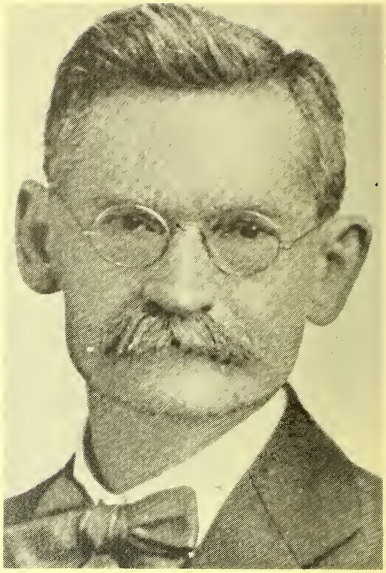
At the annual meeting of the Classis of North Carolina at Concord in the spring of 1908, Rev. Bowers was placed in charge of the interest of ths Reformed Church in Waughtown.

In accordance with those instructions, Rev. Bowers came to Waughtown and met with the residents of the Reformed faith on June 6, 1908, again in the home of J.S. Wear.

At that meeting, the church was



Rev. A.S. Peeler



Rev. J.M.L. Lyerly

officially organized under the name, First Reformed Church, Winston Salem, N.C. (This was before the adjoining towns were officially united, and hyphenated, in 1913.)

These were the charter members: John S. Wear, Andrew C. Wear, George A. Wear, Samuel A. Wear, James A. Wear, F.E. Wear, L.M. Wear, Mary Swaim, Albert A. Long, Lewis P. Long, David I. Long, J. Roscoe Long, E.E. Long and Mary Long.

John S. Wear and Albert A. Long were elected elders, and Lewis P. Long and George A. Wear, deacons, all for the term of one year. The elders and deacons were recognized, and a constitution was adopted.

The first services of the newly organized congregation were held under a brush arbor on Leight Street on June 7, 1908, by the Rev. Bowers. Services were then to be held on the first and third Sundays of each month.

In August of 1908, the Hebron Reformed Church, in the Upper Davidson Charge, noted in its minutes: "Families of J.S. Wear and A.A. Long dismissed to Waughtown Church."

The congregation continued meeting in the arbor until the fall of 1908, when the 14 members purchased a lot at the corner of Art and Waughtown streets from Lee Phillips at a cost of $500.

On this lot, a building was constructed of rough lumber for $85. The first services were held in this building on Oct. 4, 1908. On the same day, at 2:30 p.m., a Sunday school was organized with an enrollment of 74. J.S. Wear was elected superintendent; A.W. Linville, assistant superintendent; J. Roscoe Long, secretary-treasurer; Miss Daisy Rominger, assistant secretary-treasurer; D.I. Long, organist, and Thomas Long, assistant organist.

Rev. Bowers continued as supply pastor of the church. But sentiment began for a more beautiful and more permanent house of worship. On Sept. 28, 1909, the first bricks of a new building were laid by Mr. and Mrs. J.S. Wear, in whose home the first meetings were held. George Reed was contractor for the building.

In October of 1909, First Reformed Church was enrolled as a mission of the Reformed Church in the United States, and the Rev. A.S. Peeler was appointed as the first regular pastor. He took charge of the work on March 17, 1910.

The brick structure was completed, and dedicatory services were held on

**Lumber building served from 1908 to 1909.**

March 19. 1911, the the sermon being given by the Rev. J.C. Leonard, D.D., of Lexington. Several ministers from churches in Winston and Salem brought congratulations during afternoon services.

Rev. Peeler left the pastorate on Oct. 1, 1911. Then Rev. Bowers, who had been instrumental in founding the church, was called as pastor. He began his work on Jan. 1, 1912. On Oct. 23, 1921, at the beginning of a series of gospel services, he was stricken with pneumonia and died five days later

During Rev. Bowers' pastorate, on Dec. 28, 1917, a lot and house adjoining the church were purchased for a parsonage for $1,200. The house was remodeled a number of times through the years, finally serving as a youth building from 1955, when the present parsonage was completed, until 1964, when the present education building was built.

After Rev. Bowers' death in 1921, regular services were conducted by men and young people of the church. It was five months later, on May 1, 1922, that the Rev. J.M.L. Lyerly of Crescent, N.C., became pastor.

Lyerly's pastorate was not to last long, however. On Dec. 24, 1922, he was stricken and unable to continue his work. He died on March 17, 1923.

By this time, the church's rolls had increased to 92; Sunday school enrollment was nearly 200.

On Oct. 1, 1923, the Rev. A.C. Peeler (not related to A.S. Peeler) of Staunton, Va., became pastor.

The congregation had outgrown the brick structure built in 1910. On May 17, 1925, the church voted to build a new, larger building. Less than a month later, on June 7, the last services were held in the old building. The Rev. A.S. Peeler, pastor at the time the original brick structure was built, brought the message at the last service.

In two weeks, the old structure was torn down, and, on June 28, at the close of the evening service, the entire congregation took part in breaking the ground for the new building.

On Aug. 17, the new structure was

Rev. A.C. Peeler

Rev. Roy C. Whisenhunt

begun. Mr. and Mrs. J.S. Wear, in whose home the church was born and who laid the first brick of original structure, again laid the first brick of the new.

During the demolition and construction, services were held in a tent on the back of the lot.

A history written by the pastor then, the Rev. A.C. Peeler, noted: "It was a day of rejoicing on the first Sunday in January, 1926, the home sick congregation went into the basement of the new building not yet complete to hold their first service, celebrating the Holy Communion of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...." The corner stone was laid Oct. 10, 1926, and the building dedicated on June 12, 1927.

The new structure cost $75,000 in cash, in addition to the approximate sum of $50,000 given by members in the form of labor on the building. Considerable help had come from the Board of Home Missions of the Reformed Church, but a large debt remained.

The Rev. A.C. Peeler left the church, after 14 years as pastor, in late 1937.

The Rev. Roy C. Whisenhunt became pastor on March 1, 1938. During the five years he served, the membership grew, and steps were being taken to reduce the indebtedness from the new building. As the Depression faded, church members held suppers, sales and drives to help pay off the debt.

In May 1942, the Rev. Hiram E. Davis was called as pastor. The debt was liquidated in 1945, and a fund for a new parsonage was started. In 1951, an Estey pipe organ was purchased, rebuilt and installed in the church.

The new parsonage was begun in 1954 and finished in 1955, at a cost of $20,000, again leaving the congregation with a debt.

In 1957, a new mission church, St. Thomas, was organized in western Winston-Salem. A number of members of First Church, living in that area, transferred to it.

In June of that same year, the Rev. Aubrey W. Hedrick was called as pastor. On Jan. 17, 1960, the note for the parsonage was burned, again through the efforts of many in the church. On the same day, efforts were begun to raise money for a new education building, to replace the house that had originally been the parsonage.

During the next few years, studies were undertaken to determine the needs of the church in regard to the new building. From these, it was decided to build a structure similar in

**First brick church served from 1910 to 1925.**

design to the main building, and that it should house classes and facilities for young people. It was to include an assembly area, an office for the pastor, an office for the church secretary and a kitchenette, besides the classrooms.

The contract for construction was awarded on April 5, 1964; the cost, including furnishings and paving the parking lot, was estimated at $90,000. Ground was broken in May.

Jan. 17, 1965, exactly five years after its approval, was to be the dedication date for the new building. However, a heavy snowfall forced a delay until Jan. 24. The new facility left the congregation with a debt of $28,000.

Some areas of the main building were remodeled that same year, providing spaces for a Men's Bible Class and a Ladies' Bible Class. The sanctuary was redecorated in 1966, with new chairs for the pulpit and a new screen for the choir. These changes required further indebtedness for the congregation.

Rev. Hedrick resigned as pastor, effective Dec. 31, 1966, to become superintendent of the Nazareth Children's Home at Rockwell.

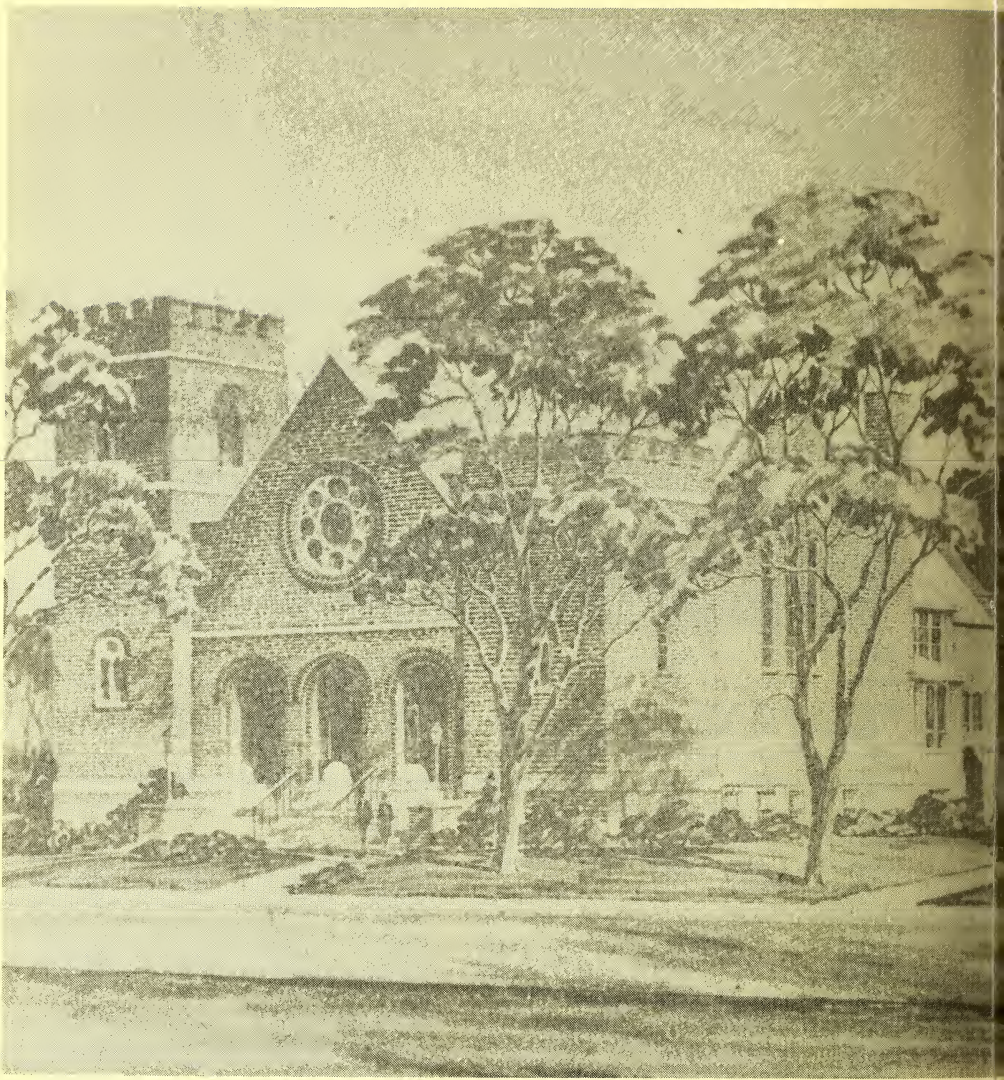
The Rev. J. Wayne Fouts was called as pastor early in 1967; he was installed on March 5. At this time the church had 311 communicant members.

The debt on the education building was paid off in 1970, ten years after the building was approved and five years after it was finished. The note was burned on May 2, 1971, with the Rev. Hedrick, pastor when it was built, as guest speaker.

In 1970, the church voted to decrease the size of the consistory from 18, the total for many years, to 12; the term of office was also reduced from three years to two.

In 1972, the Rev. and Mrs. A.C. Peeler returned to First Church after retiring. Three years later, Rev. Peeler was elected Pastor Emeritus. In 1976, Catawba College honored Rev. Peeler by conferring a Doctor of Divinity degree. He had graduated from Catawba in 1916. Mrs. Peeler died in 1979.

Rev. Peeler has remained active as a supply pastor and as a member of First Church. During a work day in 1980, he helped touch up paint around the building that had been erected



**Present church and education building,**

during his pastorate, in 1926. "But I'm not coming back in 54 more years and paint it again," he said.

Rev. Fouts resigned Oct. 31, 1972, to become chaplain at Roanoke Memorial Hospital in Virginia. Early in 1980, he and his wife were killed in an automobile accident.

The Rev. Elden Spangler served as interim pastor, until Aug. 1, 1974, when the Rev. Ingle O. Cook became pastor. He served just over a year, resigning Oct. 16, 1975.

The Rev. Josh Levens was interim pastor until the Rev. Nelson A.L. Weller became pastor Oct. 1, 1976. Rev. Levens later became "Pastor in Retirement" for the church.

On July 4, 1976, the church celebrated the nation's 200th anniversary by paying off the loan for the renovations of the main building.

During 1978, the church's pipe organ was damaged by water from a roof leak, and a fund to repair it was started. The church also decided to build a ramp, on ths rear of the main building, for the use of handicapped

**ey appeared in architect's drawing in 1965.**

members. Another fund was started for that.

The organ was rebuilt and was rededicated on June 10, 1979. Part of the money for the ramp was provided by public funds; much of the rest was raised by members of the High Aspirations Sunday School Class, made up of young people.

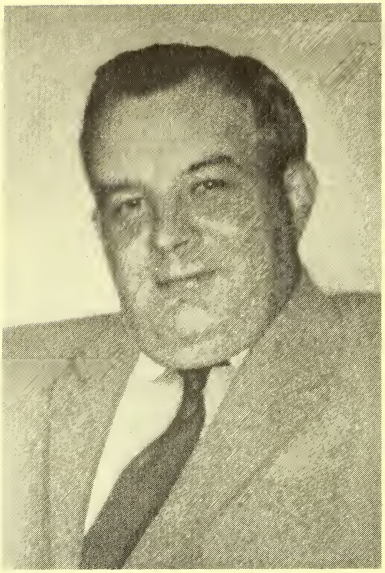
Cushions were installed on the church's pews in 1979.

Through the life of the church, the Sunday school has played an important role. Beginning with 74 members, the rolls have included as many as 325.

The women's organization has also contributed to the church. For many years, it was the Ladies Aid Society; later it became the Women's Guild.

The Men's Brotherhood has functioned effectively through the years. Several mebmbers have served in synodical and national offices.

Organizations for young people have also been active. Boy and Girl Scout units and a Youth Fellowship have served in the past, and sports teams have brought in a number of trophies.



Rev. Hiram E. Davis

Rev. Aubrey W. Hedrick

Rev. J. Wayne Fouts

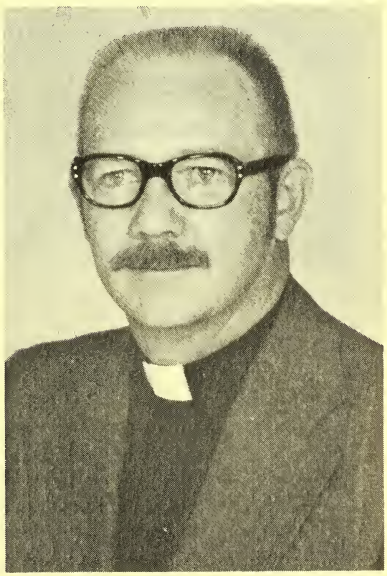
Rev. Ingle O. Cook

**Ministers of the church (from left): Rev. Josh Levens, pastor in retirement; Rev. Nelson A.L. Weller, pastor; Rev. George Johnson, retired minister; Rev. A.C. Peeler, pastor emeritus; (rear) Rev. Edwin Alcorn, association minister.**

Music has also been important in the church. Many members have served in the choirs and smaller groups. J. Roscoe Long was choir director for over 30 years. For several years, an anthem was sung each Sunday by each of the three church choirs — primary, junior and senior. At present, a children's choir sings on special occasions.

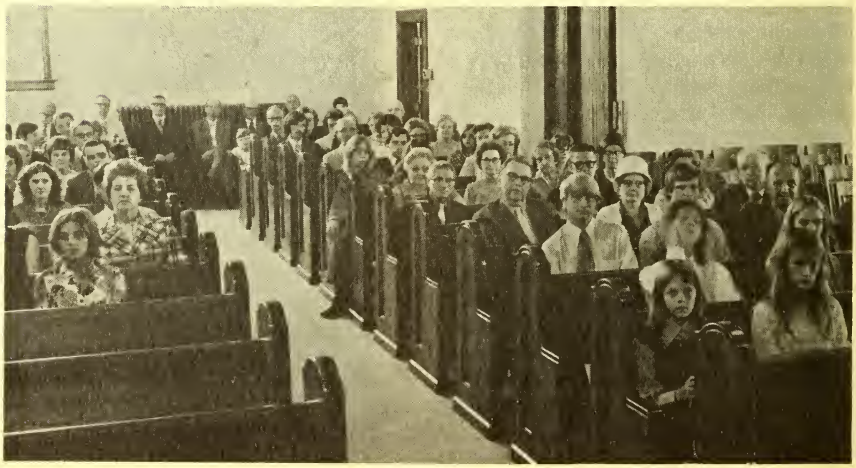
The church was orginally in the Upper Davidson Charge. In 1909, the Classis voted to place First Church and Hebron Church in the Waughtown Charge. In 1945, the Joint Consistory of the charge voted to ask the Southern Synod to dissolve the charge, effective Jan. 1, 1946. The request was granted, and, since that time, the church has not been attached to any other church.

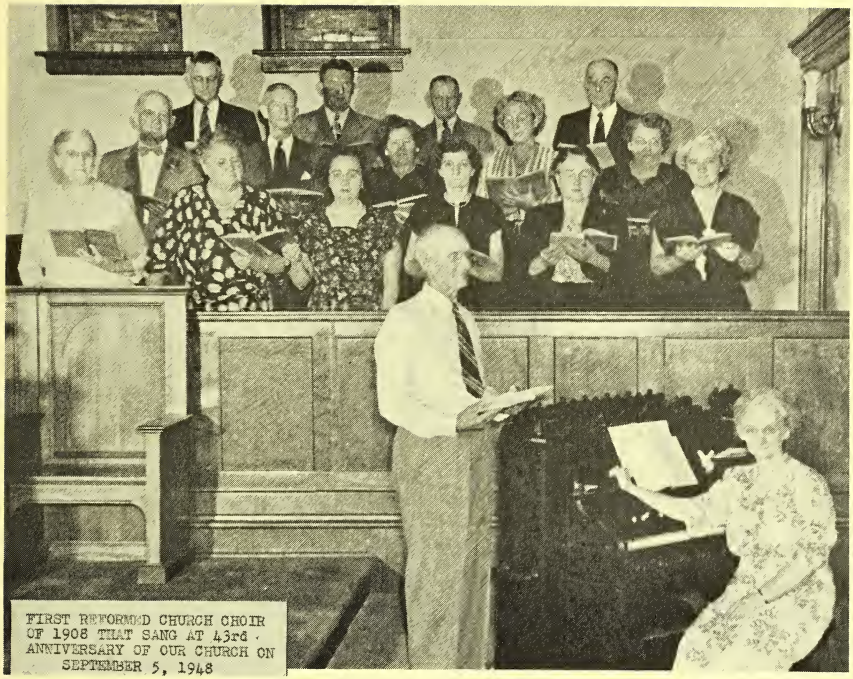
First United Church of Christ has maintained the name "First" through several changes in the national organization of which it has been a part. It was organized under the Reformed Church in the United States, which had grown out of the German Reformed Church early in the nation's history.

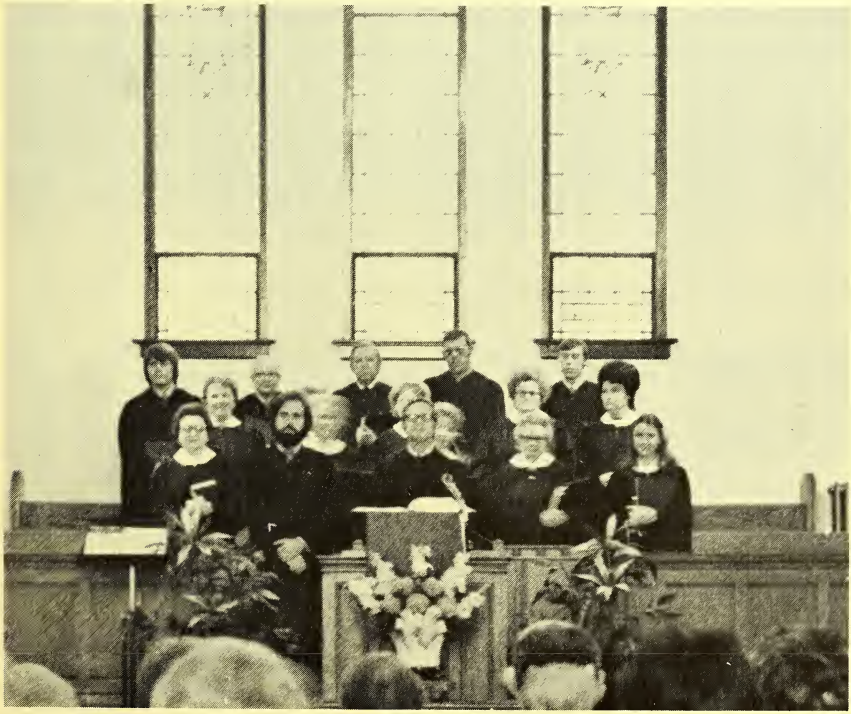


**Rev. Nelson A.L. Weller**

In 1934, the church changed its named to First Evangelical and Reformed Church, after the union of





**Choir in recent times.**

**Chrismon tree is now part of the church's traditions.**

the Reformed Church in the United States and the Evangelical Synod of North America. The Evangelical church also had its roots in Germany; in this country, much of its efforts had been in the Midwest.

The Congregational Church grew out of the work of the Pilgrims and the Puritans in New England. In 1925, it merged with the Evangelical Protestant Churches, composed mainly of Germans and German Swiss. The Christian Church was formed in three separate areas of the United States at almost the same time — North Carolina (1793), New England (1801) and Kentucky (1804). In each case, church leaders sought individual church freedoms and greater lay leadership. These movements came together in the early 1800s. In 1931, the Christian churches and the Congregationalists merged to become the Congregational Christian Church.

The United Church of Christ was formed in 1957 with the union of the Evangelical and Reformed Church and the Congregational Christian Church, and First Evangelical & Reformed Church of Winston-Salem became First United Church of Christ.